

Consumer Alert

Educating South Carolina's Consumers

A Publication of the South Carolina Task Force on



www.scconsumer.gov

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Don't take the bait on *phishing* scams

The calendar may say Fall, but phishing season is definitely upon us.

Local companies, including Bank of America and Regions Bank, have informed the Department of Consumer Affairs of phishing scams targeting their customers.

Phishing scams involve Internet fraudsters who send spam or pop-up messages to lure personal information (credit card numbers, bank account information, Social Security number, passwords, or other sensitive information) from unsuspecting victims.

According to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), the nation's consumer protection agency, phishers send an email or pop-up

message that claims to be from a business or organization that you may deal with — for example, an Internet service provider (ISP), bank, online payment service, or even a government agency. The message may ask you to “update,” “validate,” or “confirm” your account information.

Some phishing emails threaten a dire consequence if you don't respond. The messages direct you to a website that looks just like a legitimate organization's site.

But it isn't. It's a bogus site whose sole purpose is to trick you into divulging your personal information so the operators can steal your identity and run up bills or commit crimes in your name.

Hold the phone: Do Not Call Registry puts telemarketers on hold for five years





Don't get mad, get on the Do Not Call Registry.


The Federal Trade Commission's Do Not Call registry provides consumers an opportunity to block unsolicited telemarketing calls.


Registration is free and relatively simple, but details about the registry have left consumers with many questions, including when consumers need to update their registry.


Basics about registry:

 You may register online at www.donotcall.gov or toll-free at 1.888.382.1222.

 Registration is free, but must be *renewed every five years*.

 Individuals may register up to three personal phone numbers but must call from the number they wish to register.

 Upon receiving an e-mail confirmation, individuals will be asked to click on a link within 72 hours of their initial registration to complete the process.

 Phone numbers are placed on the “do-not-call” registry by the



Scam Alert: Envelope stuffing scheme leaves you with empty pockets

Consumers are being warned about an old con game that is making a comeback across the state.

SCDCA recently learned about an Arkansas company that is sending out mailings to South Carolina consumers offering them big bucks in return for stuffing envelopes.

The company previously targeted Indiana consumers before facing a 2005 lawsuit. Nevertheless, the company maintained their pre-recorded phone messages and operating system.

They are now back in business targeting South Carolinians even though an Arkansas court ruled as recently as April 2007, that the company violated the Arkansas Deceptive Trade Practices Act 1, 262 times and fined them \$1.3 million.

Envelope stuffing is a something-for-nothing scam. Participants are asked to send in a registration fee. Upon receiving the fee, the company will send the consumer

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The Help Desk: *Hiring an athlete agent*

We have all dreamed of making it to the big leagues at some time or another. For those talented enough, the first step towards turning this dream into a reality is hiring an agent. However, before hiring an athlete agent there are many things to be aware of and consider.

Rules the agent must follow

The athlete agent must register with the South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs (SCDCA) every two years. Failing to do so will void any contract between agent and athlete.

Agents may not contact athletes until being registered with SCDCA, though students can initiate contact with the agent. In such a situation the agent must

register within seven days after acting as an "agent."

A list of registered athlete agents is available at SCDCA's website at www.scconsumer.gov.

Athlete agents cannot:

- Give anything of value before a contract is signed.
- Pre-date or postdate a contract.
- Mislead or make any false promises.

What the athlete needs to know

If you have an athletic director, you must tell him you have signed a contract with an athlete agent. You may lose your eligibility to compete as a student athlete in your sport. Contract cancellation, while permissible in certain

circumstances, may not result in the restitution of athlete's eligibility.

Your contract must include:

- The amount of money you will pay the agent under the contract
- Anything the agent will receive from someone else because you entered into the contract
- A description of what services the agent will provide you
- The date you entered into the contract
- The length of the contract
- Once signed the athlete agent must give you a copy of the contract
- If the contract does not contain the required items you can void the contract.

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next day.

☎ Numbers are also shared with telemarketers who have 31 days to add the numbers to their "do-not-call" list.

☎ E-mail addresses are simply used for verification purposes, but are not given to telemarketers.

☎ The registry does not ban all telemarketing calls but does ban prerecorded sales pitches. The company must connect the receiver with a "real person" when the phone is answered.

☎ Under the Telemarketing Sales Rule, telemarketers are required to display at least their phone number on the phone when they call.

Registering cell phone numbers:

Individuals may register their cell phone number on the Do Not Call registry. Most telemarketing calls to cell phones, however, are already prohibited because automatic

dialers cannot be used with cell phones. Since the majority of telemarketers depend on this device to make their calls, individuals do not often receive unsolicited telemarketing calls on their cell phone.

Company Exemptions:

☎ The registry does not prohibit calls before 8 a.m. and after 9 p.m.

☎ The registry does not prohibit calls from companies with whom the consumer has a business relationship. A "business relationship" is established by a purchase, an inquiry, or an application. The "relationship" is active for 18 months after the most recent transaction.

☎ Individual companies may be exempt if requested by the consumer.

☎ Charity organizations, political organizations, and

Can you hear me now? Telemarketers can't, at least not on your cell phone. Most telemarketing callers are unable to contact cell phones due to a ban on automatic dialers.



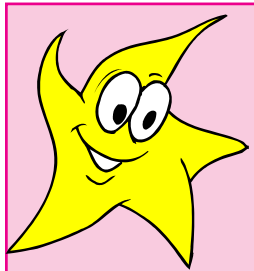
telephone surveyors are exempt.

Frequently asked questions:

- *Can I verify my registration?* Yes. Go online at www.donotcall.gov or call toll-free at 1.888.328.1222.
- *Can I delete my phone number from the registry?* Yes. Call toll-free at 1.888.382.1222.
- *Can I register my work number?* No. The Do Not Call registry is for personal numbers only, not business or fax numbers.
- *Do I need to register again if I move?* Yes. You need to register your new number, but you do not need to remove your old number.

Lifesmarts competition gearing up for 2008

The South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs (SCDCA) encourages high school students, teachers, and parents to participate and enter a team in the 2008



South Carolina children are all superstars in the Lifesmarts contest.

LifeSmarts competition.

The contest begins today and is open to all teens in 9th – 12th grades.

The program also launched a new addition to their website today called

Techno Lab, which offers groups activities and learning lessons about technology issues to be used in and out of the classroom. Students and teachers may visit the site at www.lifesmarts.org.

SCDCA hosts the annual LifeSmarts competition that tests students' knowledge of the following consumer areas: personal finance, health and safety, environment, technology, and consumer rights and responsibilities.

During the online competition, teams across the state compete for one of six positions at the State Competition held in Columbia during March 2008.

The winning team at the State Competition will represent South Carolina at the National LifeSmarts Competition that will be held April 12-15 in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

LifeSmarts, established by the National Consumers League, is designed to supplement classroom curriculum or be used as a learning activity in clubs and organizations outside the classroom.

It is important to note players and teams may come from a variety of sources, not limited to schools.

Consumer Spirit Award nominations being accepted

The Department of Consumer Affairs is now accepting nominations for the 2008 Consumer Spirit Awards. The Consumer Spirit Awards are presented annually to recognize individuals and organizations that empower South Carolinians through consumer protection and education initiatives.

All individuals, organizations, and businesses are encouraged to participate. The deadline for nominations is December 14, 2007. Winners will be honored at a ceremony in February 2008.

Awards will be given in the following categories: Organization Leadership Award, Dublin/Robinson Consumer Champion Award, Governmental Excellence Award, and Media Partnership Award. A panel of representatives from various communities, governmental agencies, media outlets and past winners will serve as judges.

Judging criteria is as follows:

- Strategy: The nominee must demonstrate knowledge of and solutions for consumer needs.
- Execution: The nominee must complete their strategy honestly and professionally.
- Originality: The nominee must implement creative, innovative methods to help consumers.
- Results: The nominee's efforts must directly benefit South Carolina consumers.

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mailers and envelopes to stuff and seal.

The individual will be guaranteed a small amount for each stuffed envelope that meets company standards. Not surprisingly, an envelope will rarely, if ever, meet "company standards."

After Hours: Identity Theft and Credit Repair held on Sept. 18

The South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs presented a special session of *After Hours: Identity Theft and Credit Repair* on August 21.

After Hours is an after-business-hours program aimed to educate South Carolina consumers. *After Hours* is typically held every third Tuesday of the month and features free consumer education seminars.

This month's *After Hours* focused on how to identify theft and how to repair your credit. Specialists will be on hand to instruct you on ways to avoid having your identity stolen. Credit repair specialist will also be present to answer questions on credit improvement.

After Hours is held at the SCDCA office, 3600 Forest Drive, Columbia.

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You may lose your eligibility to compete as a student athlete in your sport.

If you have an athletic director both you and the athletes agent must notify your athletic director within 72 hours after entering into this contract.

You may cancel the contract within 14 days after signing it. Cancellation of the contract may not reinstate eligibility.

The individual does not get paid, but this does not stop the company from sending out the envelopes. In essence, the company gets consumers to promote their scheme for "free," and also pockets the initial fee.

SCDCA to staff booth at State Fair

The South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs (SCDCA) encourages all fair-goers to stop by the Department's booth at the South Carolina State Fair for free information and promotional materials.

SCDCA representatives will be available to answer consumers' questions and provide helpful brochures and fact sheets. Consumers whose questions cannot be handled on site will be instructed on how to get in touch with the proper authorities at the SCDCA home base.

The Department will be located in the Hampton Building October 10-21. SCDCA will feature different topics each day to coincide with the State Fair's "Theme Days."

"The State Fair is a great opportunity for us to reach consumers where they are and provide the answers they want and need to make smart marketplace decisions," said Alice Brooks, SCDCA Public Information Director.

Schedule of Featured Topics:

Oct. 10-12: Predatory Lending, ID Theft, Debt Collection

Oct. 13: Credit Issues, Contact Lenses, Vehicle Issues, Shopping Online

Oct. 14: Telemarketers, Insurance Scoring, Energy Savings, Scams

Oct. 15-16: Credit Issues, Young Consumers ("Consumer Cash," Comic books and more for kids!)

Oct. 17: Credit Issues, Vehicle Issues, Senior Issues and Scams

Oct. 18: Exceptional Citizens Issues

Oct. 19: Vehicle Issues, Predatory Lending

Oct. 20-21: Predatory Lending, ID Theft, Debt Collection

Got Questions??? Ask Consumer Affairs with online chatting

Think you have been a victim of a scam or just need general information about fraud protection?



Are you an athlete agent or pre-need burial provider in need of additional instructions about licensing? Or are you a business that has questions about the Buyer Beware list?

Then log on to *Ask Consumer Affairs*, an interactive forum that provides you with great consumer information.

Visit the South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs website at sconsumer.gov and click on LIVE CHAT.

A communication specialist is there to assist you with any questions you may have Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. until 5:00 p.m.



Money Tips

Some things are best purchased new; Kleenex and Q-tips come to mind. Many items, however, have plenty of shelf life after their first owner.

The following are 10 things you should never buy new:

- Books
- DVDs and CDs
- Small children's toys
- Jewelry
- Sports Equipment
- Timeshares
- Cars
- Software and video games
- Office furniture
- Hand tools

"Late Nights" offers extended hours for more convenience



"Late Nights" allows consumers with especially busy schedules a few extra hours to reach Consumer Affairs.

Office hours are extended from 5:30 p.m. until 7:00 p.m. on the third Tuesday of every month.

The program is designed to give consumers the convenience of after-work hours.

Consumers are welcomed to call during the additional hours at 803.734.4200 or toll free in S.C. at 1.800.922.1594.

For more information about "Late Nights" please contact the Public Information Division at 803.734.4190.

S.C. Department of Consumer Affairs Mission and Values Statement:

To protect consumers from inequities in the marketplace through advocacy, mediation, enforcement and education.

The Department strives to be a **CREDIT** to our State by holding the following values as essential in our relationships and decision-making:

Competence **R**espect **E**quality
Dedication **I**ntegrity **T**imeliness

The Commission on Consumer Affairs

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The Honorable Mark Hammond, Secretary of State, Columbia
Barbara B. League, Greenville
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Alice Brooks, Director of Public Information
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About the South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs:

Established by the Consumer Protection Code in 1974, the South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs represents the interest of South Carolina consumers. Our mission is to protect consumers from inequities in the marketplace through advocacy, mediation, enforcement, and education. For more information on the SCDCA, visit www.sconsumer.gov.